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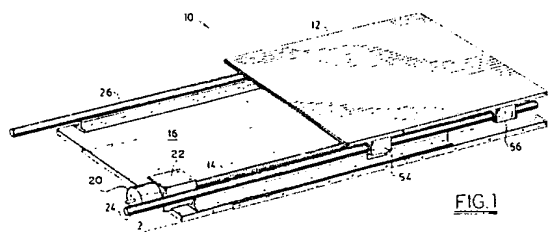
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**D-70323 Stuttgart (DE)**(54) **Precision moving stage.**

(57) A precision positioning stage assembly (10), comprising a movable stage (12), a drive screw (14) having its axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12), a follower (18) threadably engaged with the drive screw (14), and a linear guide rail (24) for supporting one side of the stage (12). The linear guide rail (24) having its axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12). A drive member is secured to the stage (12) which has a pair of oppositely disposed contact surfaces (51,53) spaced apart a predetermined distance. A torque member (28) is secured to the follower (18), the torque member (28) having a drive section (32) for placement between the contact surfaces (51,53) and moving the stage (12) along the guide rail. The drive section (32) and the contact surfaces (51,53) having an configuration so as to provide substantially point contact therebetween.



This invention relates to a precision moving stage which is employed to move an article along a linear path at a precise constant speed.

It has been found that a stimuable phosphor may be used in radiation image recording and reproducing systems. Specifically, a sheet provided with a layer of stimuable phosphorus (herein referred to as stimuable phosphorus sheet) when first exposed to radiation passing through an object, such as a human body, will provide a radiation image stored thereon. When this image has been exposed to a stimulating ray beam such as a laser beam, this will cause the stimuable phosphorus sheet to emit a light in proportion to stored radiation energy. The light emitted by the stimuable phosphorus sheet, upon stimulation thereof, is photoelectrically detected and converted to an electric image signal, and the radiation image of the object is reproduced by a visible image by use of image signal on a recording medium such as a photographic film. The stimulating of the stimuable sheet by a laser beam is typically done using a raster scanning technique. The slow scan direction transport of the stimuable phosphorus sheet is important to the quality of the generated image. Slow scan velocity must be regulated such that the exposure modulation of the scanning beam does not cause image signal modulation greater than a threshold of visible contrast modulation. Therefore, it is important to provide a well regulated linear motion.

Lead screw mechanisms are commonly used to convert angular velocity to linear motion. Such mechanisms usually employ at least one linear guide rod. Lead screw mechanisms commonly require extreme precision and manufacture and assembly in order to function without sticking, jamming, or causing vibrations in required input torque. Any one of these events may cause observable velocity changes when the lead screw mechanism is used for storage phosphorus raster scanning. In addition, linear guides that are used with the lead screw must be exactly parallel to the lead screw and to each other in order to prevent jamming. Similarly, the bearings attached to the moving stage, which supports the stimuable phosphorus sheet, must be co-linear (at all points) to the guides on which they operate to prevent jamming. For long linear motion, such mechanisms may be beyond the capability of normal manufacturing methods to build, thus requiring time-consuming and expensive adjustments during assembly.

Additionally, the mechanism used to guide the stage can not be too loose, or outside forces such as externally applied shocks, dust on the linear guides, and so forth, can ruin an image being formed by the raster scanning mechanism. The mechanism guiding the linear motion must be suffi-

ciently rigid so that expected forces do not deflect the moving stage such that artifacts will show in the scanned image.

Thus there exists a problem in the prior art in providing a precision stage assembly which reduces the required precision and expense of manufacturing while maintaining smooth, rigidly guided linear motion to a stage.

The foregoing problems are addressed by providing a precision positioning stage assembly according to the invention as laid down in claim 1 and the precision positioning stage assembly is applied in a reader for latent images according to claim 11.

In the Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment of the invention presented below, reference is made to the accompanied drawing, in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a precision stage assembly made in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 2 is a side elevational view of the precision stage assembly of Figure 1 as taken along line 2-2;

Figure 3 is a partial perspective view of the precision stage assembly of Figure 1 with the stage removed;

Figure 4 is a top plan view of the precision stage assembly of Figure 3;

Figure 5 is a cross-sectional view taken along line 5-5 of Figure 4 with the addition of the stage;

Figure 6 is an enlarged cross-sectional view taken along line 6-6 of Figure 4 with the addition of the stage;

Figure 7 is a side elevational view of Figure 6 as taken along line 7-7;

Figure 8 is a top plan view of Figure 7 as taken along line 8-8;

Figure 9 is a greatly enlarged cross-sectional view taken along line 9-9 of Figure 4 including a portion of the stage; and

Figure 10 is an enlarged cross-sectional view taken along line 10-10 of Figure 4 including a portion of the stage.

Referring to the drawings, there is illustrated a precision stage assembly 10 made in accordance with the present invention. The precision stage assembly 10 is designed to be incorporated into a reader for reading of a stored image on a stimuable phosphorus sheet that has been exposed to radiation. In particular, the precision stage assembly 10 is designed for use in a raster scanning reader. The precision stage assembly 10 includes a moveable stage 12 which includes a drive screw 14 which is mounted to base 16. The drive screw 14 is in threaded engagement with a drive nut 18. Movement of the drive nut 18 is caused by relative rotation of the drive screw 14. A motor 20 and

corresponding transmission 22 is provided for rotating drive screw 14 in the appropriate direction. This stage 12 is supported by a pair of guide rails 24,26 which are axially spaced apart and secured to base 16. The guide rails 24,26 and drive screw 14 are in substantial parallel alignment with each other.

With respect to coupling of the drive nut 18 to the stage 12 so as to transmit linear motion by rotation of the drive screw 14, it is desirable to couple only that component of the drive screw motion which is parallel to the local axis of the linear guide rails 24,26. This allows the drive screw 14 to be installed with loose tolerances with respect to the linear guides rails 24,26. This also allows the linear guides rails 24,16 and drive screw 14 to be only reasonably straight, and thus allow for small variation from parallelism. Referring to Figures 2-9, there is illustrated in greater detail the manner in which linear motion is transmitted to the stage 12. As can be seen in the preferred embodiment illustrated, the drive screw 14 is rigidly attached to base 16 allowing it only free to rotate about its longitudinal axis. A torque member 28 is secured to drive nut 18 and is used for transferring the rotational movement of the drive screw 14 to the linear motion of the stage 12. The torque member 28 also provides means for resisting rotation of the drive nut 18 about the drive screw 14. In the particular embodiment illustrated, torque member 28 comprises a generally flat plate member having a mounting section 30, a drive section 32 immediately above the mounting section 30, and a stop section 34 which extends from the drive section 32 outward between the stage 12 and adjacent guide rail 24. In the particular embodiment illustrated, stop section 34 has a generally rectangular configuration. The mounting section 30 is provided with a central opening 36 through which the drive screw passes and a plurality of openings 38 through which screws 39 pass to clampingly secure the torque member 28 to drive nut 18 by engaging threaded openings provided in drive nut 18. It is, of course, understood that the torque member 28 may be secured to drive nut 18 in any desired manner. Stop section 34 is provided with a narrow slot/opening 42 which divides stop sections to an upper section 43 and lower section 44. The slot 42 in the particular embodiment illustrated has a width W of .06 inches (1.74 cms). The stop section 34 extends adjacent guide rod 24 such that the lower surface 45 of lower section 44 engages the top of guide rail 24. The upper section 43 has a small outwardly extending projection 46 which extends above the top surface of the adjacent upper section 43. Projection 46 preferably extends a distance D of approximately .06 inches (1.72cms) thereabove. The torque member 28 is made of a material such that projection 46 is in engagement

with the bottom surface 47 of moveable stage 12 while at the same time the bottom edge 45 engages the top of guide rail 24. The bottom edge 45 of lower section 44 stops the drive nut 18 from spinning about the drive screw 14. This causes the drive nut 18 to travel forward along the lead screw 14. The upper section 43 contacts the bottom surface 47 of the stage 12 and serves the same purpose for reverse rotation of the drive screw 14. The split stop section 34 also is slightly spring loaded against the bottom surface 47 of the stage 12 to prevent/minimize the transmission of vibration as the stage moves between its two stop positions. The bottom edge 45 of the lower section 44 is also free to slide transversely (as illustrated by arrow 49) with respect to the adjacent guide rail 24. This allows transverse misalignment between the drive screw 14 and the adjacent guide rail 24 to be accommodated without sticking or jamming. Also any transverse component from rotation of a warped lead screw 14 is accounted for without changing the required input torque. Additionally, any vertical misalignment between the drive screw 14 and guide rod 24 is accommodated by the vertical clearance between the torque member 28 and stage 12 which allows gradual rotation of a torque member 28 and drive nut 18 about the guide surface. Further, vertical components resulting from warped drive screw rotation are permitted without variation of the required input torque.

Referring to Figures 7 and 8, there is illustrated means for transferring the linear movement of the drive nut 18 to the stage 12. In particular, the stage 12 is provided with a pair of drive members 50,52 which are secured to the bottom of moveable stage 12. The drive members 50,52 are positioned on both sides of the torque member 28 so as to capture the drive section 32 therebetween. The spacing between the two drive members 50,52 is such that the torque member 28 fits snugly therebetween. Each of the drive members 50,52 have a contact surface 51,53, respectively, which engages the sides of torque member 28. Each of the contact surfaces 51,53 are configured so as to provide point contact with the torque member 28. In the preferred embodiment illustrated, the contact surfaces 51,53 each have a generally semi-spherical cross-sectional configuration and the sides of the torque member 28 are substantially planar. Referring to Figure 8, there is illustrated by solid lines the initial position of the torque member 28 between the drive members 50,52. The coupling between drive members 50,52 and torque member 28 is designed such that only the component of a drive screw 14 which travels parallel to the local axis of the linear guide is being transferred. As torque member 28 moves either vertically, or horizontally, with respect to the adjacent linear guide

rails 24,26 and stage 12, the torque member 28 is free to slide between the contact surfaces 51,53 as illustrated by the phantom lines in Figure 8. This allows a transverse motion between the components. This construction also minimizes jamming, or variation in the required input torque due to the wobble of the drive nut 18 and torque member 28 caused by rotation of a warped drive screw 14.

Means are also provided for compensating for misalignment between the stage 12 and the linear guide rails 24,26 upon which the stage 12 is slideably mounted. Referring to Figures 1-3, the stage 12 is slideably mounted to guide rail 24 by a front bearing assembly 54 and rear bearing assembly 56.

The stage 12 is also slideably mounted to linear guide rod 26 by a third bearing assembly 58. Bearing assemblies 54,58 are identical in construction. Therefore, this application will be limited to discussion of single bearing assembly 54, it being understood that the bearing assembly 58 is identically constructed. Bearing assembly 56 is substantially the same as bearing assembly 54, except with minor differences which will be discussed later therein.

Referring to Figures 9 and 10, bearing assembly 54 includes a collar 60 which is slideably mounted to guide rail 24, a mounting section 62 secured to collar 60 by a set screw 64 which engage threaded opening 66 in collar 60. The bearing assembly 54 is secured to the stage 12 by a shoulder screw 68. The stage 12 is provided with a recess 70 having a opening 72 which extends through the stage 12. The opening 72 is such that a bearing surface 74 is provided. The screw 68 has a head 76 which is larger than the opening 72, but less in size than the recess 70 such that the top of the head does not extend above the top of the adjacent stage 12. An annular spring 77 is provided between the bearing surface 74 and bottom surface 78 of the head of screw 68. The bottom surface of the shoulder 80 of shoulder screw 68 passes through opening 72 and engages a slightly raised projection having a planar surface 82. As can be seen, the vertical position of the stage 12 is assured by spring 77 positioned between the head 76 of screw 68 and the bearing surface 74.

The mounting of bearing assembly 56 to guide rail 26 is similar to 24 except that in place of opening 72, there is provided an elongated slot which accounts for any change in distance between the two guide rails 24,26. The mounting of the stage 12 in the manner disclosed by the present invention allows the guide rails 24,26 to be mounted using normal manufacturing tolerances.

The present invention provides a relatively inexpensive slow scan motion for a storage phosphorus raster scanner which can be made utilizing

inexpensive parts, manufacturing and assembly techniques. Additionally, a mechanism made in accordance with the present invention provides reliability due to its ability to account for misalignment that may occur during use. The rotary motion of the drive screw is converted to a linear motion without sticking, jamming, or variation in required input torque. Further, the present invention provides a rigid mechanism that minimizes disturbance in the motion of the stage due to outside forces such as shocks, or contamination of the guide rails.

### Claims

1. A precision positioning stage assembly (10), comprising:
  - a movable stage (12);
  - a drive screw (14) having a longitudinal axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12);
  - a follower (18) threadably engaged with the drive screw 14;
  - at least one linear guide rail (24) for supporting one side of the stage (12), the linear guide rail (24) having its axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12);
  - a drive member secured to the stage (12), the drive member having a pair of oppositely disposed contact surfaces (51,53) spaced apart a predetermined distance; and
  - a torque member (28) secured to the follower (18), the torque member (28) having a drive section (32) for placement between the contact surfaces (51,53) and moving the stage (12) along the guide rail (24), the drive section (32) and the contact surfaces (51,53) having a configuration so as to provide substantially point contact therebetween.
2. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in claim 1 wherein the contact surfaces (51, 53) have a semi-spherical configuration and the drive section is substantially planar in cross section.
3. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in claim 1 wherein stage (12) is slideably secured to at least one of the linear guide rails (24) by at least one slide bearing assembly (54,56,58).
4. A precision positioning stage assembly 10 as claimed in claim 3 wherein at least one slide bearing assembly (54,56,58) comprises a shell structure (60) slideably mounted to at least one guide rail (24), a mounting section (62) secured to the shell structure (60) for attachment

to the stage (12), a mounting screw (68) for securing the mounting section (62) to the stage (12) and spring means (77) between the mounting screw (68) and stage (12).

5. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in the claims 1 through 4 wherein the drive screw (14) is mounted on a base (16).

6. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in the claims 1 through 4 wherein the torque member (28) has a substantially planar drive section (32).

7. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in the claims 1 through 6 comprising:

a pair of spaced linear guide rails (24,26) mounted to the base 16 for supporting the stage (12), each of the linear guide rails (24,26) having its axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12),

means for compensating for misalignment between the drive screw (14) and the linear guide rails (24,26) upon which the stage is slideably mounted; and

means for compensating for misalignment between the stage (12) and the linear guide rails (24,26) upon which it is slideably mounted.

8. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in claim 7 wherein the means for compensating for misalignment between the drive screw (14) and the linear guide rails (24,26) upon which the stage (12) is slideably mounted comprises the drive section and the contact surfaces (51,53) having a configuration so as to provide substantially point contact therebetween.

9. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in claim 8 wherein the means for compensating for misalignment between the stage (12) and the guide rail (24,26) upon which the stage (12) is slideably mounted comprises the at least one bearing assembly (54,56,58) comprising a shell section (60) slideably engaging the guide rails (24,26) and a mounting section (62) having a threaded opening (66), the stage (12) having an opening (72) and a bearing surface (74) disposed around the opening (72), a shoulder screw (68) for placement through the opening (72) in the stage (12) and engagement in the threaded opening in the mounting section (62), and a spring (77) associated with the shoulder screw (68).

10. A precision positioning stage assembly (10) as claimed in any previous claims comprises means for transferring linear motion of the follower (18) to the stage (12).

11. A reader for reading a latent image on a stimulable phosphor member, the reader having precision positioning stage assembly 10 for moving the stimulable phosphor member through a scanning station, the precision positioning assembly 10 comprising:

a movable stage (12);

a drive screw (14) having a longitudinal axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12);

a follower (18) threadably engaged with the drive screw (14) for converting rotational motion of the drive screw (14) to linear motion;

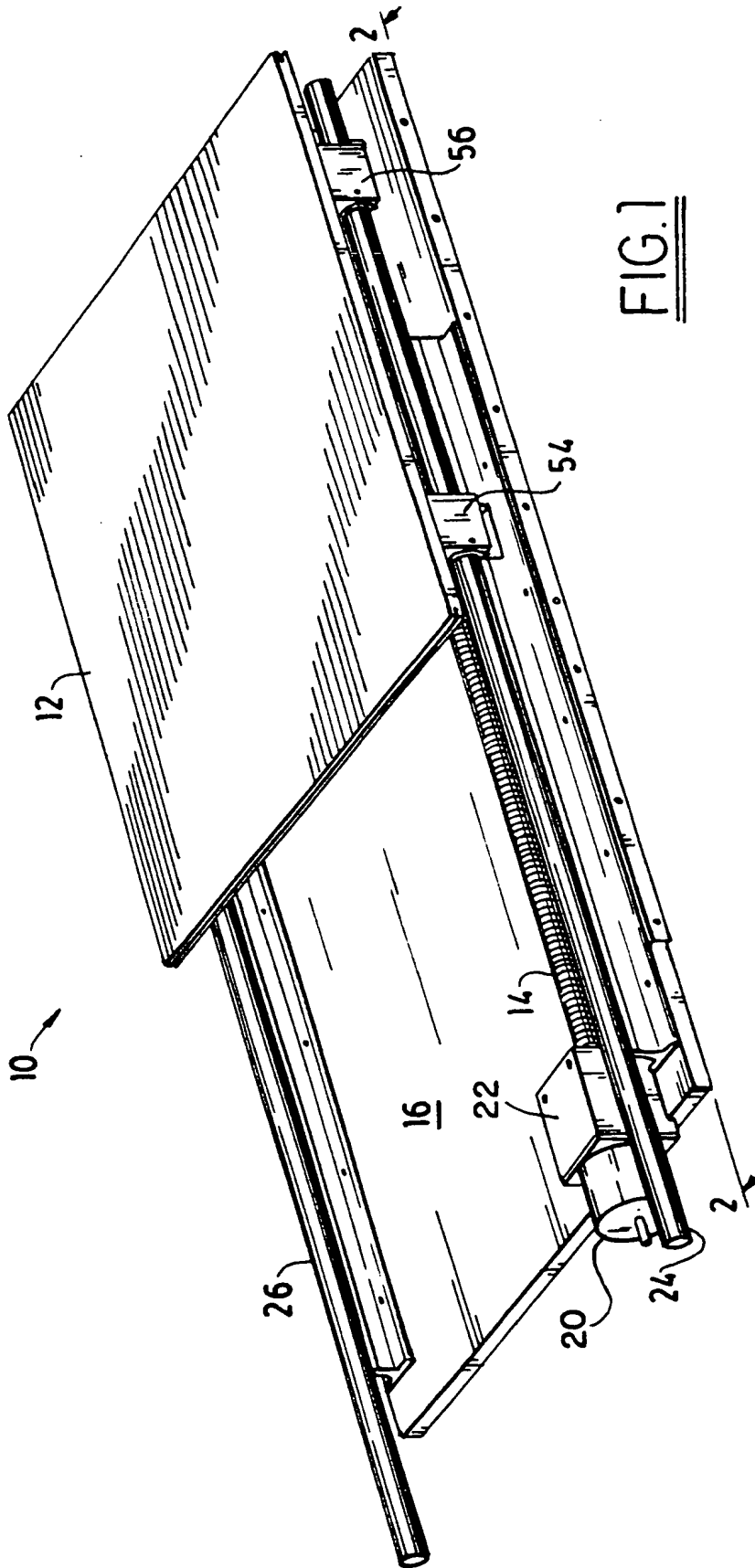
a linear guide rail (24) for supporting one side the stage (12), the linear guide rail (24) having its axis parallel to the direction of movement of the stage (12); and

means for transferring linear motion of the follower (18) to the stage (12), wherein the means transferring the linear motion comprises point contact surfaces (51, 53) provided therebetween.

12. A reader for reading a latent image on a stimulable phosphor member, as claimed in claim 11 comprises:

means for compensating for misalignment between the drive screw (14) and the linear guide rail (24) upon which the stage (12) is slideably mounted; and

means for compensating for misalignment between the stage (12) and the linear guide rail (24) upon which it is slideably mounted.





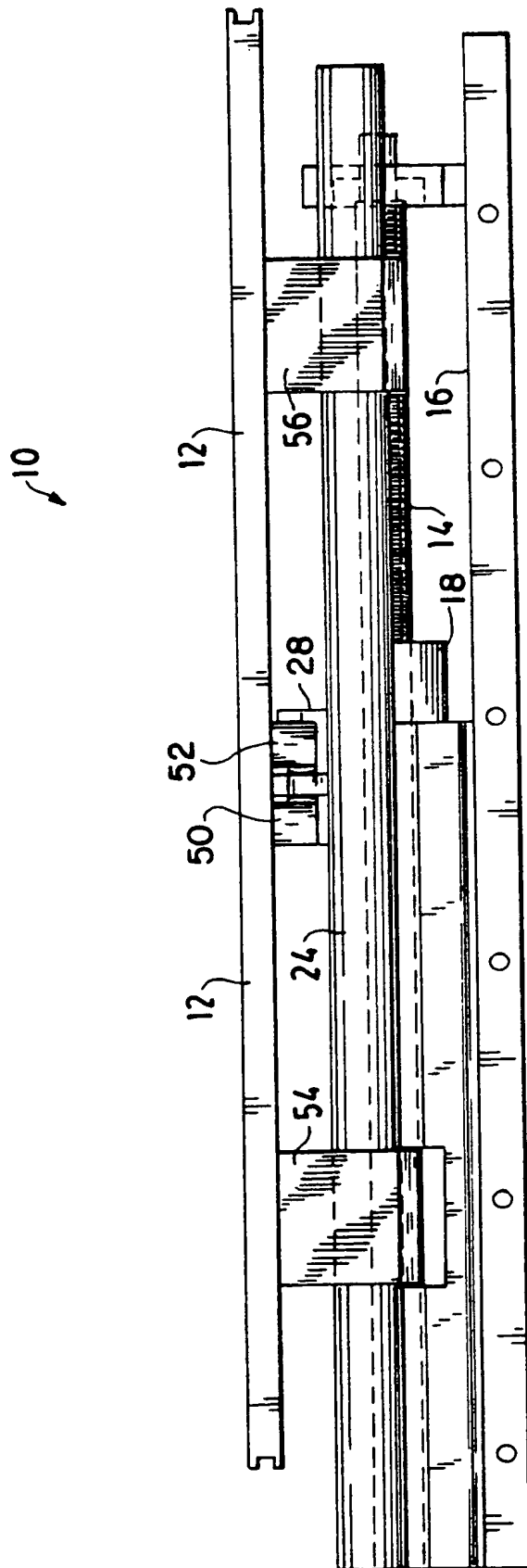
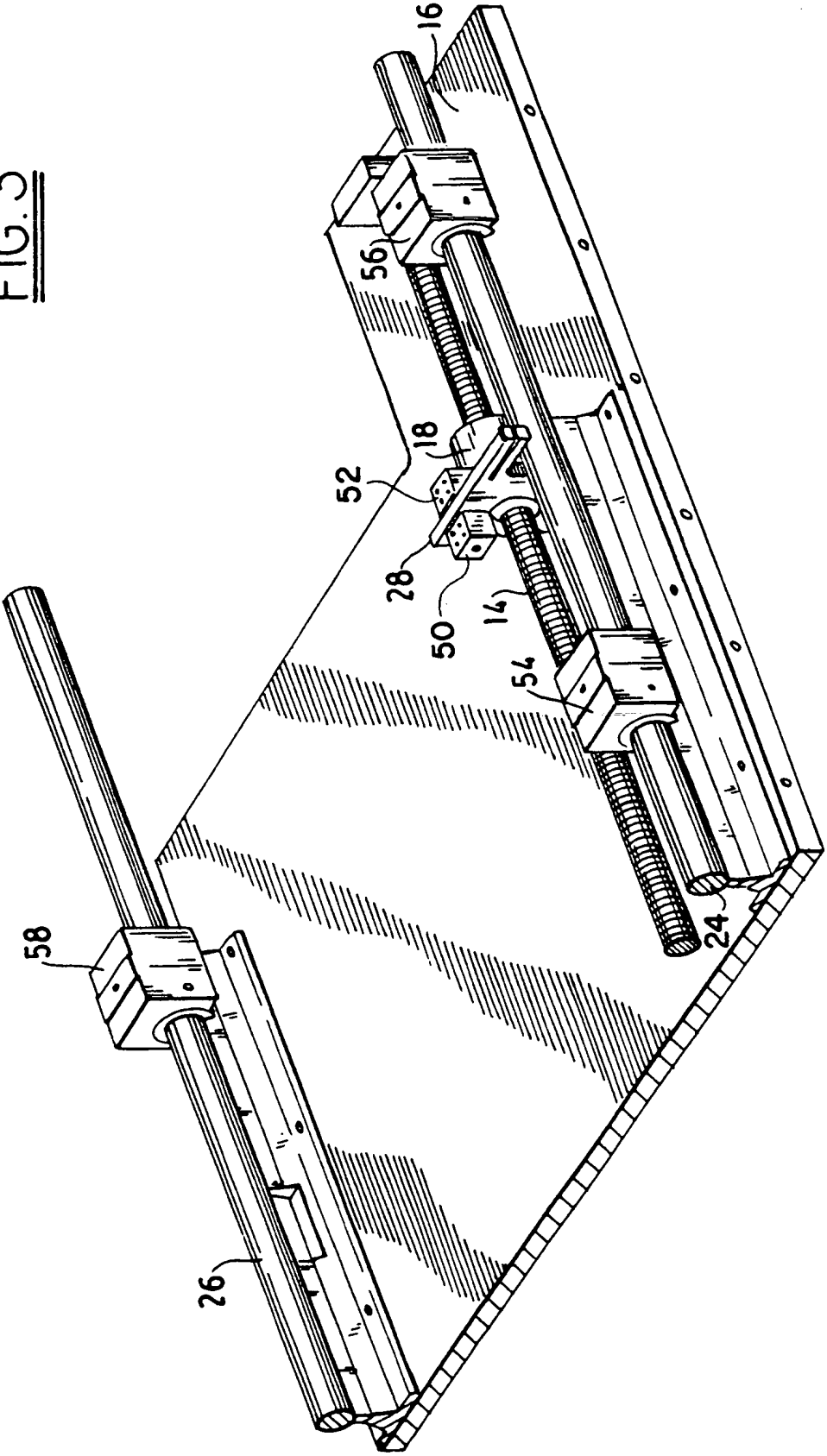
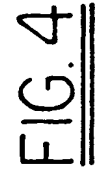


FIG. 2

FIG. 3





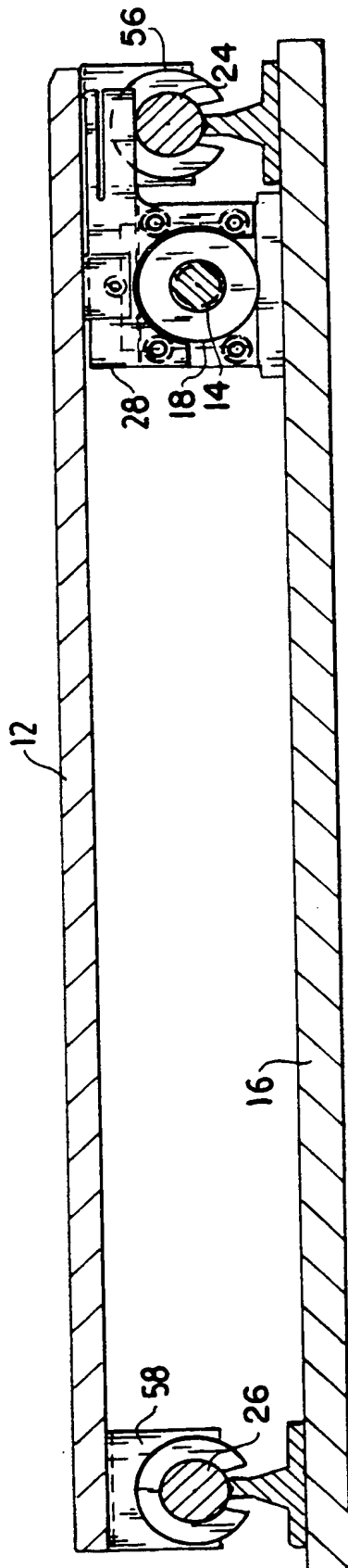
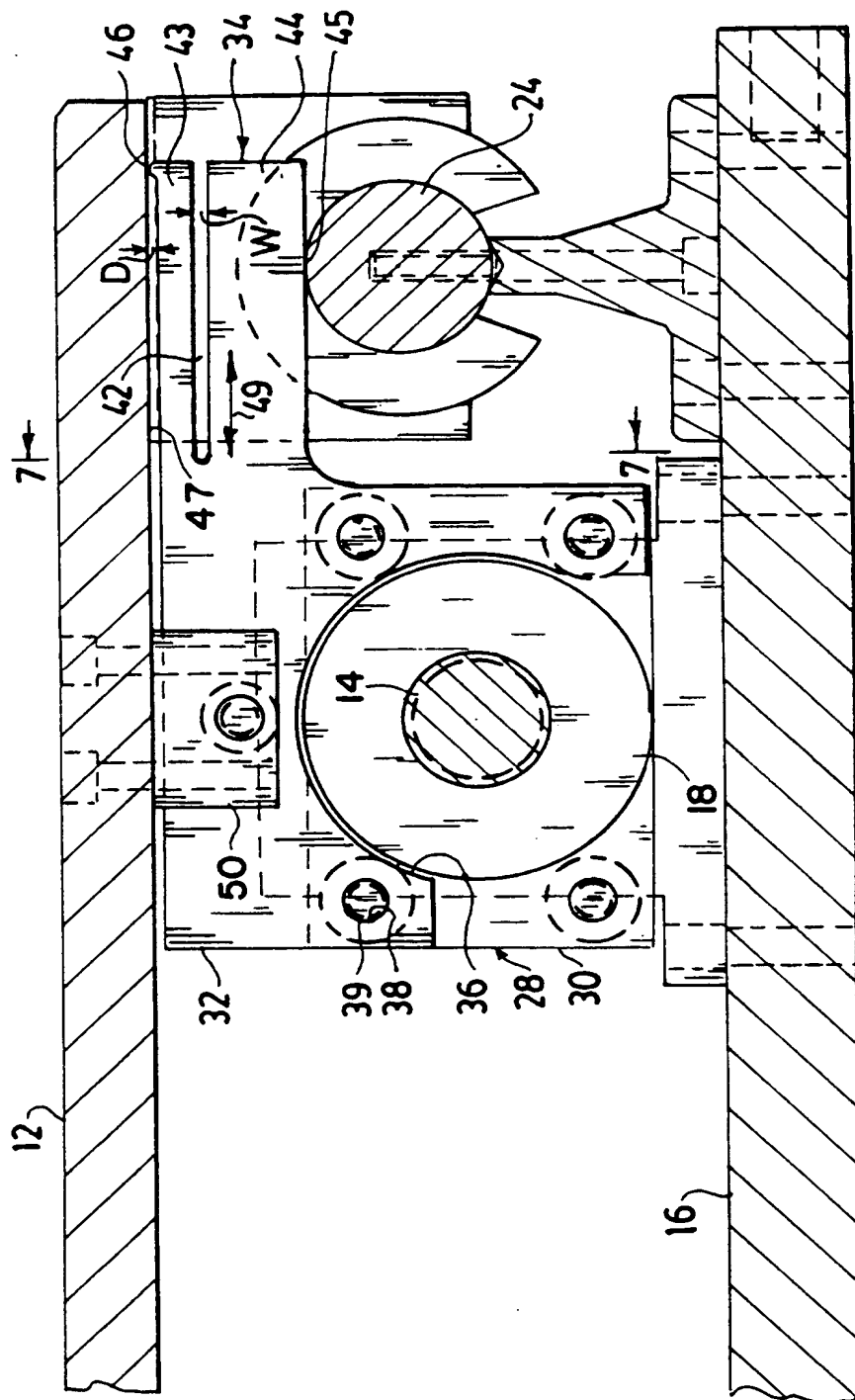
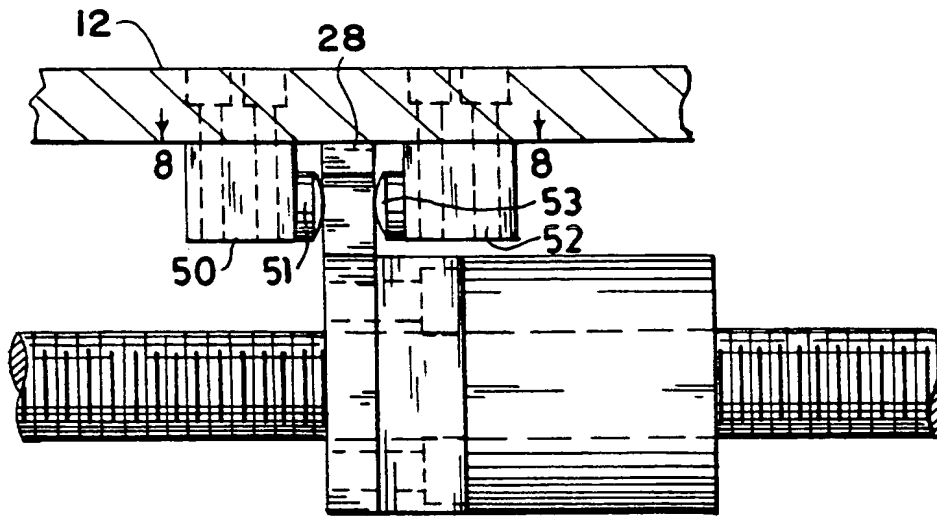


FIG. 5





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FIG. 7

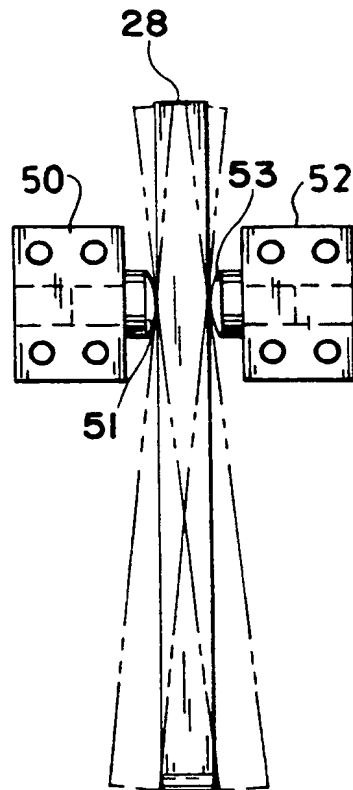


FIG. 8

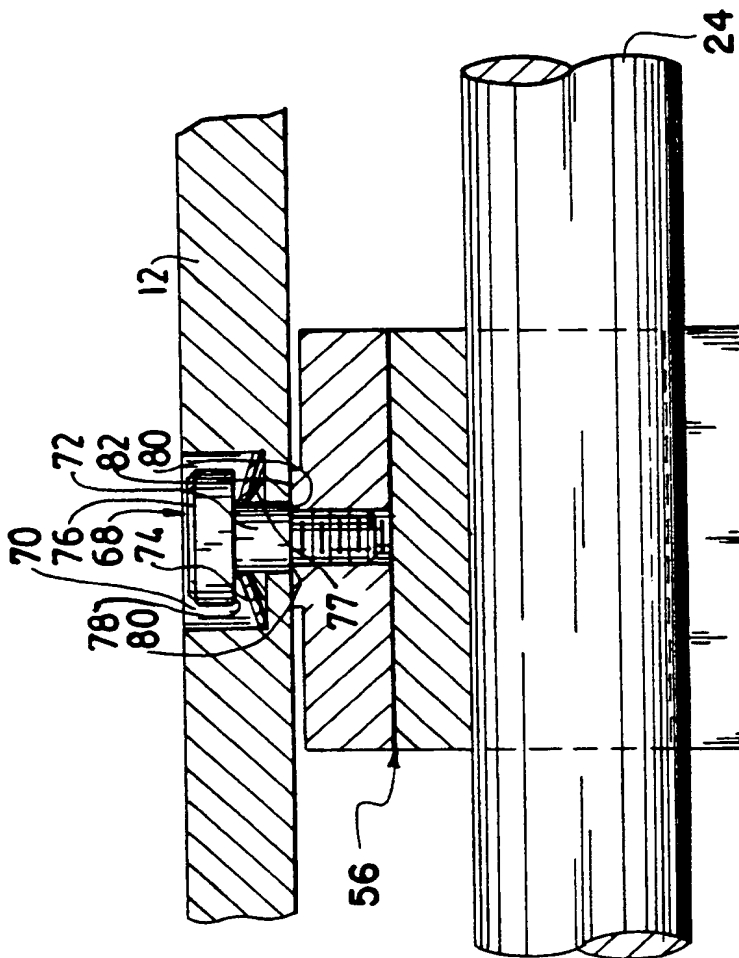


FIG. 9

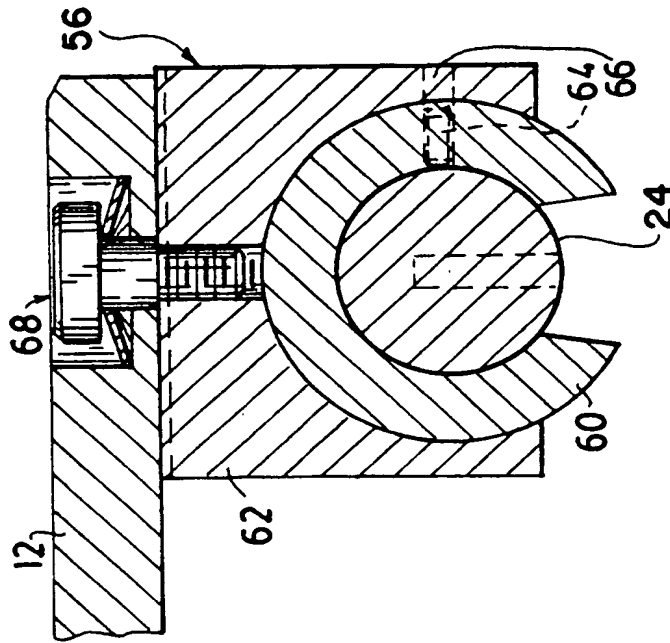


FIG. 10



European Patent  
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## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number  
EP 93 11 7710

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.5)
A	US-A-4 285 012 (OHARA ET AL.) 18 August 1981 * figures 1,4 *	1-12	H04N1/10 H04N1/04
A	US-A-3 541 580 (SAITO) 17 November 1970 * figures 2,3 *	1-12	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.5)
			H04N G03B B41J B23Q F16H F16C A61B A61G G01D F16B B41F
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 25 February 1994	Examiner Hoekstra, A
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